



Buzzwords ...

Postage Paid
Wellington
Permit No. 699

Return address:
Box 4048
Wellington

ISSN 0114 -0795

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..... the newsletter for National Beekeepers' Association members

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Buzzwords No 43 July 1992



"WHAT DO YOU MEAN NO BEES ARE ALLOWED?"



FROM THE PRESIDENT

With all the debate going on in our industry right now, it's nice to be able to pass on a bit of good news. The news concerns an increase in apiculture servicing and shows how important it is for the National Beekeepers Association to have a strong voice with government.

The imbalance of MAF services between the North and South Islands has been of considerable concern to your executive for some time. Now, as a result of extensive lobbying, MAF Quality Management has approved a new Apicultural Advisory Officer position, hopefully to be based in Dunedin. Members should be under no illusions, however. The new position is conditional on continued industry support and moneys from government for exotic disease surveillance and Emergency Response.

The National Beekeepers Association Annual Conference and A.G.M. will take place in Hastings, July 20-23, at the Angus Motor Inn. I look forward to seeing you all there.

And finally, sincere thanks to the *Buzzwords* team for their efforts over this past year. Well done to you both! (Believe it or not, this was unsolicited. Thanks, Dudley! - the editors)

AAO POSITION PROPOSED

MAF Quality Management has announced that it will soon be advertising for an Apicultural Advisory Officer. The position will most likely be located at Invermay, near Dunedin. The move will increase MAF's services to beekeepers in the South Island and will re-establish a specialist apiculture position in the Southland and Otago regions. The officer will likely take over management of the surveillance program for exotic bee diseases, carry out analysis of surveillance

samples currently contracted to MAFTech, and play a significant role in Exotic Disease Response preparedness. The job will also probably involve maintaining the southern South Island Apiary Register and acting as an additional resource servicing the endemic disease control contract on behalf of the NBA. Interviews for the position are scheduled to take place at the end of July.

Job specifications and further information on the position can be obtained from Stuart White, MAF Quality Management, Private Bag, Christchurch, ph (03) 794 100 fax (03) 656 479.

MAF Quality Management

MAF ORGANIC DASH

A new European Community (EC) organic food regulation, set to take effect from July 22, 1992, has caused concern for some New Zealand beekeepers supplying the lucrative European organic honey market. The regulation (EC 2092/91) requires that any food product sold in EC countries using the word "organic" must have been properly inspected and certified during both its production and preparation. For products from outside the EC, the regulation also requires that "third country" certifying authorities be approved by the European Commission before the products can be sold in the EC as organic.

Currently in New Zealand, both the New Zealand Biological Producers and Consumers Council (Bio-Gro) and the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association (Demeter) have certification schemes in place for organic products. But to date, New Zealand has not been added to the EC's list of approved "third countries".

No one knows for sure whether the EC would directly approve these non-governmental organisations as third country certifying authorities, but the speculation is that they would prefer an independent governmental body to oversee the certification schemes of private organisations. In EC countries, at least, the regulation requires such governmental "control authorities" to be set up to supervise and approve private certification schemes.

The problem for New Zealand producers is that the our government appears to have been a bit tardy in forming a control authority and making application to the EC for approved third country status. Several years ago MAF began putting together a comprehensive certification system for organic products, but this initiative seemed to stall following the release of a public discussion paper issued by John Falloon, the Minister of Agriculture, in September 1991.

The paper stated that MAF would "not move to establish uniform national standards for organic farming and organically grown food." The minister did pledge, however, to "support development of uniform international standards and their acceptance by foreign governments". He also made available the services of MAF Quality Management to any producers who wished to either arrange for inspection and certification based on existing standards or develop standards of their own. Your NBA executive did just that by

recently developing a draft set of standards for organic honey production in New Zealand (see *Buzzwords* 42).

Still, producers were left wondering what the government was going to do in the case of the EC. Was it going to just "support development" or was it going to set up the required control authority. In response to an enquiry from the Bay of Plenty branch, we have now been informed that the government has decided to take the plunge, and is in the process of preparing its application to the EC. This will be dependant on the creation of a "soon to be established" MAF Regulatory Authority which will act as an overseer supervising private organic inspection bodies. So far, Bio-Gro, Demeter, and MAF Quality Management have all expressed interest in being recognised as "inspection bodies".

We can only hope that MAF meets the EC deadline and New Zealand honey exports aren't affected. Because as Deputy Minister Denis Marshall points out in his letter to the Bay of Plenty branch, "there is not a great deal of time to prepare New Zealand's case."

AFB LAB COURSE SOON

Beekeepers will soon be able to analyze their own live bee samples for AFB, thanks to a course being devised by Dr. Mark Goodwin, CRI Horticulture, Ruakura, and Cliff Van Eaton, MAF Quality Management, Tauranga. The course will teach beekeepers how to determine likely and inapparent infections in their hives and should help to decrease the spread of American foulbrood, which has more than doubled in New Zealand in the last decade. The lab technique used is a simple, straight-forward test which can be carried out at home using readily available materials.

The course will get a trial run with members from the Bay of Plenty branch in late June and will hopefully then be offered to other branches around the country later this winter. Branches will be sent further details at the end of July.

GISBORNE ASIA PUSH

Gisborne Honey Producers Co. made a marketing push into Southeast Asia last month by attending the International Food Industry Show in Taipei, Taiwan (May 25-29). According to marketing manager Barry Foster, "The company believes that there is an extremely good future in Asia for exports of New Zealand honey, and particularly to such countries as Taiwan, and we are targeting this area for our future exports." Taiwan certainly has good potential, with a population larger than that of Australia and overseas investments rivalling those of Japan.

Gisborne Honey Producers markets three specialty types of honey (manuka, tawari, and wildflower) as well as comb honey, kiwifruit and honey, and a lemon and honey beverage concentrate. Company director Brian Smith says all the products had a favourable response at the show, and samples of their manuka honey mead were a particular hit. The mead won a silver medal at the 1990 NZ Fruit Wine competition, a first for New Zealand meads.

Export News, May 21, 1992



HONEY HITS OZ

If you think New Zealand faces a problem with honey brought in by travellers from overseas, consider the poor Australians. In the past two months, Barrier Control officials in their airports have intercepted more than 1000 people carrying honey, and most of them are New Zealanders!

The Australian government is concerned that the full message regarding honey exports to their country is not getting through and has asked both the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the National Beekeepers Association to help. Recently MAF requested all airport shops selling honey to post a notice or at least advise people that off-the-shelf honey cannot be taken into Australia as accompanying baggage. MAF is also likely to contact all New Zealand travel agents in the near future to make sure they advise their clients about the current situation.

To help out our friends across the Tasman, your executive would like to remind members that they are currently not permitted to take uncertified honey with them to Australia. Members also have a responsibility to inform customers of these regulations if it is obvious that they intend to take honey products with them overseas. Hopefully in the near future, protocols will be established which will allow Australian entry for our certified heat-treated honey sold in airport gift packs. That way everyone can take over some nectar from the land of milk and honey!

* Seizures of honey into New Zealand from all sources (aircraft, mail, yachts) for the 9 months ending March 31 totalled 2015 (224 per month). Fifteen hundred and twenty-two of those seizures were from aircraft passengers (out of a total 1.3 million passengers during the period). The seizures weighed in at a whopping 4.2 tonnes!

ADAM CONTROVERSY GROWS

In *Buzzwords* 41 we published an article from the *Sunday London Times* reporting on the shock retirement of Brother Adam and the way Buckfast Abbey had handled the affair. One of our readers, Lee Elliot from Oskar Honey Co., Auckland, was disturbed by the report, and joined the growing number of beekeepers from around the world who have written to the Abbot of Buckfast expressing their concern about the situation and the future of the Buckfast bee breeding programme.

Lee has kindly shared with us his reply from the abbot, which makes interesting reading (to say the least). The abbot claims that Brother Adam's assistant of 20 years standing was not removed, which is basically correct. But *The Times* reported that it was the newly elected abbot's decision not to actually employ the individual, who had helped Brother Adam on a voluntary basis for over 20 years and was his chosen successor, which led to Adam's resignation in February.

The abbot also does not specifically say that the Abbey will continue on with Brother Adam's work in the future. The abbot claims Brother Adam "has been supported by the abbey community far beyond what would be expected in

academic or industrial circles, where he would probably have retired some 20 years ago, simply because he is a member of this monastic community." The only promise the abbot makes is that "the principles upon which Brother Adam's research is based will continue to be used at Buckfast Abbey." You never know, maybe that means they'll just use Buckfast bees in their honey production colonies!

Overseas, the controversy continues to grow. The May issue of *The American Bee Journal* reports a little detail that *The Times* must have missed. It seems the abbot changed the keys to the Buckfast bee department hours after Brother Adam resigned, supposedly for fear that Adam might set fire to his own files! This and other revelations have led to a threat from queen producers in the U.S. and Europe to withhold royalties to Buckfast Abbey worth over NZ\$115,000 a year. It is also claimed that the retirement may result in additional lost revenue of up to a third of a million dollars once the new mite-resistant Buckfast Bee begins to be sold in North America. According to Brother Adam, "the tragedy is that I was on the verge of a breakthrough" with this new bee.

Negotiations are still under way to try to resolve the problem. Brother Adam's keys have been returned and beekeeping organisations in Europe are pledging funds to subsidize the salary of a competent replacement. But so far the abbot won't budge on the appointment of Brother Adam's now-famous "non-employed" assistant.

IMPORT/EXPORT CRITERIA EXPLAINED

How does the government go about deciding whether honey imports will be allowed in from Australia? And why is our industry being asked to adopt conformity systems for exports of bee products? An article in the June 15 edition of *Sentinal* magazine provides interesting background to these questions and also explains why export certification needs to stay in the hands of government departments.

According to the article, the decision to allow imports is made by the New Zealand government after an in-depth animal and plant health assessment has been carried out. The assessment looks at:

- the structure, authority and capabilities of the agency responsible for agricultural security and health certification;
- the infrastructure and capabilities of the plant and animal health services available to producers; and
- the plant and animal health status of the country concerned.

The policy of the New Zealand government is to hold the exporting government (rather than its producers) accountable for the health status of its exports. It only approves certifying authorities which are government agencies capable of independently assuring health status

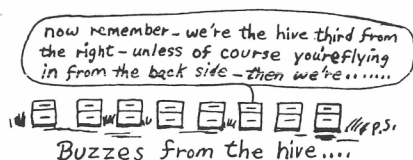


HONEY INDUSTRY TRUST FUND

Applications for funding close on 15 August and 15 February. Forms available from the NBA, PO Box 4048, Wellington.

on behalf of the country concerned. It does not approve certification from private bodies or associations.

The article points out that this policy is also an international convention, and that the same criteria are enforced by other countries on New Zealand. According to the article, "these assessments are becoming critical to continued access of New Zealand products into import markets." Since most countries are now making assessments of their trading partners, our government believes there is a need for an international standard for use in judging the conduct and fairness of these assessments.



1080 HEATS UP

Pest Control Coordinators employed by the country's Regional Councils recently received a letter from the Pesticides Board outlining a new policy regarding beehives and 1080. The letter recommends that beekeepers be given a minimum of four weeks warning of any 1080 jam bait applications, and asks coordinators to provide notification to all beekeepers with hives within a 3 km radius of 1080 jam bait operations.

The letter follows continuing reports of bee deaths from such operations, including a publicised case in the Taumarunui area involving the loss of field bees from 120 hives just prior to kiwifruit pollination. Norm and Mary Dean, the beekeepers involved, have so far not received compensation for the loss from the Manawatu Wanganui Regional Council. This is because the Land Resource Officer in charge of the operation, Mr. Eric Dodds, believed that in this case the council's only legal requirement was to notify beekeepers owning hives within a 400m radius of the operation. A *Rural Report* item on the case quoted Mr. Dodds as saying that until the Dean's poisoning "he was totally unaware that bees foraged up to 5km away from hives. Knowing that makes the ruling of only notifying beekeepers with hives within 400m of the bait stations totally inadequate."

We find it hard to believe that Mr. Dodds wasn't really aware of the problem, especially since the King Country has had a number of 1080 operations over the years, many of them involving beekeepers and bee poisonings. Mr. Dodds actually told *Rural Report* that he had been poisoning possums for the Regional Council for more than six years and had never had an issue like this come up before. Contrast these statements with a letter written personally to him by John Bassett from Te Kuiti, six months before the poisoning, which clearly informed him that bees can fly at least 3 km!

There were a number of other disturbing issues in the Dean case, including the use of an out-of-date (aerial) application permit from the Medical Officer of Health and the "inadvertent" placing of 50 bait stations within 60m of a public road. In such circumstances the operation could only be described as "an accident waiting to happen" and it may have been fortunate that the bee hives and the possums were the only things poisoned!

This new recommendation from the Pesticides Board should at least clear up the problem of Pest Coordinators not knowing how far bees fly. And the four week notice period should give beekeepers some additional warning so that they can move their hives. The new warning period may still cause problems, however, both for the beekeepers and Pest Coordinators. For the beekeepers, four weeks' warning might very well not be enough time during pollination, when the weather is wet, or in the middle of a honey flow. And for the Coordinators, the recommendation makes it difficult for them to act in the stipulated 48 hours once a case of bovine Tb is confirmed. Council staff don't apply the 1080 baits immediately because they first have to survey the area and feed out a series of non-toxic lure baits. But according to at least one Pest Coordinator, there are still likely to be times when the full four weeks won't be met.

The letter from the Pesticides Board also contained news regarding the oxalic acid bee repellent for 1080 jam. According to the board, trials to date have indicated that while oxalic acid is an effective repellent in 1080 jam formulations, test results have been variable in terms of possum acceptance. The letter says that work is proceeding to resolve this problem, and Coordinators have indeed been instructed to once again carry out trials with oxalic acid. However, the question would seem to be whether such trials, carried out in a non-scientific way, are ever going to produce a consistent (or even valid) result.

As Norm Dean said on *Rural Report*, "beekeepers are not against poisoning possums. They are a curse to us as well because they kill the forage we depend on." It's just that maybe beekeepers have been a bit too cooperative. Some people in the industry are beginning to wonder whether it isn't about time we insisted publicly that the government possum programme stop killing our bees.

BUZZWORDS IS ...

Published by the National Beekeepers' Association of New Zealand, PO Box 4048, Wellington.

Production by Cliff Van Eaton and Nick Wallingford.

Articles and feedback to *Buzzwords*, c/- MAF, Private Bag, Tauranga. Fax (07) 578 8429, phone (07) 578 2069. Deadline for copy is the 20th of each month.

The views expressed in *Buzzwords* are not necessarily those of the National Beekeepers' Association nor of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

